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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 001657

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM: QATAR

REF: A. DOHA 203

[B](#). DOHA 324

[C](#). DOHA 1226

[D](#). DOHA 910

[E](#). DOHA 561 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador C. Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

[1](#). (S) The extent and nature of extremism in Qatar is limited by several factors. One is Qatar,s considerable wealth, which enables it to steer clear of the poverty-inspired extremism affecting poorer nations. Other factors are the small size of the country (comparable to Connecticut) and population (less than 800,000 inhabitants, of whom four-fifths are expatriates). To date, only a handful of Qatari nationals have been found to participate in extremist-inspired activities in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and the State Department evaluates the threat of indigenous terrorism as low in Qatar. The Embassy is aware of pockets of dissatisfied elements with extremist tendencies among Qataris and some expatriates here, but these elements do not appear linked or organized in ways that constitute a serious threat.

[2](#). (S) U.S. outreach and engagement efforts in Qatar generally take place in a favorable environment. Bolstered by the country,s significant wealth (Qatar has the highest GDP per capita income in the world), the Emir of Qatar has been driving a broad political and educational modernization program since 1995.

Host government initiatives

[3](#). (C) The US plays a unique role as Qatar,s chosen strategic partner in its national security, industrial development and education reform plans. As a result, the role of U.S. outreach and engagement in Qatar is less to provide inspiration and innovation than it is to facilitate Qatari initiatives in these areas. The following are some of the Qatari government initiatives that play an important role in combating extremism:

Education Reform

[4](#). (SBU) Revamping of the K-12 curriculum: The Qatari government has undertaken a sweeping revamping of the education system in Qatar, analyzing and reissuing text books, intensifying focus on English language skills, math, science and critical thinking skills, with a commensurate decreased emphasis on religious education.

[5](#). (SBU) Recruitment of U.S. college branch campuses: Five major U.S. colleges (Texas A&M, Weill-Cornell, Carnegie-Mellon, Virginia Commonwealth University and Georgetown University) have now established branch campuses in Doha, bringing a resource-rich U.S.-style education to the doorstep not just of Qataris and residents of Qatar, but of nationals and residents throughout the Gulf region.

Political Reform

[6](#). (C) Increasing opportunities for political participation and empowerment: Political reforms aligned on the side of combating extremism have included a recently promulgated Qatari constitution that includes guarantees of civil rights and paves the way for the election of a National Advisory Council of 45 members (two-thirds elected and one-third appointed by the Emir). Qatari women will vote and compete on an equal basis with male candidates.

Promoting religious tolerance; fostering debate

[7](#). (C) Conference for Religious Dialogue (Ref C): Already known for hosting an annual conference known as the Muslim-Christian Dialogue since 2003, the government of Qatar expanded the scope of this conference in 2005 to include for the first time representatives of the Jewish faith. Representatives from the three monotheistic religions were invited, including the Anglican Church, the Coptic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Vatican and Jewish Rabbis, among

others.

18. (C) Churches in Qatar (Ref D): There are generally amicable, mutually respectful relations between persons of differing religious belief in Qatari society. Qatari Muslims are 90 percent Sunni and 10 percent Shia and there is no notable friction between the two groups. The majority of Qatar's non-citizen population consists of South Asian, South East Asian or expatriate Arab nationals who represent the Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Baha'i faiths, among others. In 2005, the Qatari government signed a 50-year lease with representatives of Christian churches in Qatar, permitting them to erect six churches on a 500,000 square meter plot of land in Doha.

19. (C) The Doha Debates (Ref E): The state-funded Qatar Foundation sponsors an ongoing series of public debates, hosted by BBC veteran talk show host Tim Sebastian. The debates, which explore issues of topical importance and general interest (the most recent motion, for the sixth debate, was: "Arab governments have failed the Palestinian people") are recorded and subsequently televised on BBC World TV. The latest debate will also be broadcast on BBC World Radio. The debate format pits two prominent speakers against two others, and after their exchanges, the floor is opened to the audience, who are local members of the public. The debates are usually very lively and well-attended, with considerable audience participation.

10. (C) In February 2005, the Qatari government permitted Muslim leaders from the Middle East, North Africa and Indonesia to convene a conference entitled "Global Anti-Aggression Campaign by Peaceful Means" (Ref B). The conference focused on hostility experienced by Islamic communities in different countries. Several speakers appealed for the conference to focus on constructive self-examination of problems and needs within the Islamic community and to avoid facile attribution of problems to machinations of the West.

Engagement with Islamists

11. (C) Qatar is the home-base of Yusuf Al Qaradawi, a prominent Islamic cleric who hosts a weekly show on the pan-Arab satellite TV channel Al Jazeera, and whose sermons often include strident denunciations of U.S. activities and policies. (Qaradawi has also publicly denounced terrorist activities such as the 9/11 attacks and the more recent bombings in London and Sharm Al-Sheikh and labeled Al Qaeda followers such as Al Zarqawi "criminals.") Post maintains an active ongoing dialogue with Al Qaradawi, and also continually engages conservative and Islamist elements of Qatari society, including representatives of "Islam Online," the Islamic internet site headquartered in Doha. Post is also actively engaged with Al Jazeera itself and pursues a policy aimed at increasing Al Jazeera's journalistic professionalism and toning down its sometimes inflammatory programming.

Terrorism Financing

12. (C) Qatar has been a full and responsive partner in our campaigns against terrorism and terrorist financing (Ref A). Qatar actively seeks U.S. advice and assistance to augment its anti-terrorism capabilities, strengthen relevant laws, and enhance intelligence exchange. The government has been responsive to requests from the U.S. to identify and freeze assets of organizations and individuals designated as Foreign Terrorism Organizations. Qatar has also coordinated closely with the U.S. on centralization and restructuring of charitable donation oversight.

The Press

13. (C) The local Qatari press is dominated by the print media (three Arabic language dailies and two English language dailies), all of which are often critical of USG policies in the region and on a global level. Although all publications foster a limited degree of public debate over internal governmental policies and some social issues, they also practice fairly rigorous self-censorship on issues related to both religion and Qatari foreign policy. The Qatari press in general provides willing coverage of Embassy activities and of prepared policy statements from the Ambassador, including those that promote USG anti-extremism positions. Post has taken and will continue to take advantage of the platform provided by local press to engage all elements of Qatari national and expatriate society, including conservative and Islamist elements.

Exchange programs

14. (SBU) Post continues to build its local database of US

alumni among Qatari and long-term expatriate residents of Qatar. Exchange programs - whether they have a specific religious tolerance component or not -- are among the most effective anti-extremism tools available to post: having Muslim men and women see America and Americans with their own eyes wins hearts and minds, and each heart and each mind won in this fashion has a multiplier effect in local society. The addition of MEPI resources has expanded the resources available for exchange programs from Qatar, particularly with regard to women and youth.

15. (C) Embassy comment: Qatar,s high degree of cooperation and coordination with the U.S. on countering extremism within its borders is only partially rooted in the Qatari leadership,s commitment to a long term strategic relationship with the U.S. It is more deeply rooted in the clear understanding that their ambitious development aspirations depend on the maintenance of stability and security in Qatar and in the Gulf region. Knowing they are located a very dangerous neighborhood, Qatar,s leaders maintain a keen focus on security related matters. End Comment.

UNTERMEYER